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Progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

National institutions and administrative capacity in small island developing States*

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I. Introduction

1. Pursuing sustainable development requires, *inter alia*, a strengthening of national institutions and administrative capacity. This need is clearly recognized in the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

II. National action for institutional and administrative capacity-building

2. The institutional response of many small island developing States to meet the new needs of sustainable development have taken various forms. A common feature that has emerged is the establishment in several of them of a high-level body, either a council or commission, often chaired by the head of the Government or a senior minister. For example, in Mauritius a national environmental commission was set up, chaired by the Prime Minister, with a broad membership, including ministers responsible for economic planning, finance, education, science and technology, energy and natural resources, tourism, industry, health, justice and local government. A key mandate of the commission is to ensure coordination and cooperation between public departments, local authorities and other governmental organizations engaged in environmental protection programmes. In Barbados, a national commission on sustainable development has been established, with broad representation from various ministries and the involvement of the private sector and major groups. A major responsibility of the commission is to facilitate national-level coordination of sustainable development programmes and to promote public awareness. Similarly, an environment, science and technology commission in the Office of the Prime Minister of the Bahamas is broadly represented, with participation by academics and the private sector. The principal task of the commission is to coordinate efforts to protect the environment, implement sustainable development policies, and advance the use of science and new technology. In Fiji, an interdepartmental coordination mechanism has been set up to provide for an effective environmental management capability, heritage protection and meaningful public participation. In the Federated States of Micronesia, a President's Council on Environment and Sustainable Development has been established to coordinate and oversee sustainable development activities of national government departments.

3. Formulation of a national sustainable development strategy that serves as an overall policy framework is another important initiative taken by many small island developing States Governments. In Singapore, the Green Plan, which dates back to the early 1990s, has served as a national master plan to guide the country into the twenty-first century. Over 130 specific action programmes have been formulated and are under implementation, with inputs from government ministries, non-governmental bodies and private organizations. Industry has taken a more proactive approach, while heightened awareness among the communities has led to their greater involvement in numerous environmental activities. In the Pacific, 13 island countries have prepared and adopted national environmental management strategies. This has been accompanied by an increase in staffing of relevant units in most Pacific small island developing States.

4. In Haiti, the establishment of the Environment Ministry in 1995 was followed by the preparation of a national environment action plan, which aims to integrate Haiti into the environmental mainstream and provide the Government with a special tool for the sustainable development of the country. In addition, specific environmental directives have been tentatively drawn up for waste management and air pollution reduction and metal scrap disposal. With the assistance of international institutions, Haiti is also proceeding with the codification of environmental legislation as a further step towards a strengthened institutional capacity for achieving sustainable development objectives.

5. A number of small island developing States Governments have extended the above-mentioned initiatives to specific sectors. For instance, in the tourism industry, which is a major sector in many small island developing States, an integrated approach has been adopted to address the sustainability of tourism in all its dimensions, including the new institutions and administrative capacity required for achieving sustainable tourism. A multi-pronged strategy, composed of new legislation, training and restructuring of government agencies, has been implemented. A wide range of new laws have been enacted in some small island developing States, establishing standards for land use in tourism, tourism facilities and investment in tourism. For instance, in Saint Lucia, following the establishment of a national sustainable tourism commission, the Minimum Standards Act has been adopted with a view to addressing all areas of hotel, restaurant and tourism carrying capacity. Jamaica has carried out a review of existing environmental legislation, which has resulted in the passage of new legislation requiring the conduct of an environmental impact assessment for all new development.

6. In addition, some small island developing States, such as Cyprus, have started using economic instruments as a new

tool for reorienting tourism development. Various new tax incentives have been introduced to diversify and upgrade tourism products. Fiscal instruments are used to encourage sound land use and coastal zone practices. The same set of instruments have been applied in other tourism-related sectors so as to improve the overall quality and balance of sustainable tourism.

7. But although these measures are important achievements, there are still small island developing States that have not yet taken action to put in place the necessary legislative and administrative frameworks that will enable them to meet the growing requirements of sustainable development programmes and activities. Even in those that have taken important initiatives, key obstacles to effective national cross-sectoral and interdepartmental coordination remain, such as inadequate skilled manpower resources allocated to the enforcement of new legislation, and weak official status and authority accorded to new coordination mechanisms that are yet to be sufficiently funded and staffed in some small island developing States. The experiences of small island developing States to date suggest that institutional and administrative capacity-building is a protracted and complex process that requires sustained political commitment and sufficient resources.

III. Regional cooperation

8. Realizing the constraints arising from their limited financial and human resources, small island developing States Governments have shown greater interest in regional and subregional cooperation for building and strengthening national institutions and administrative capacity. Many regional and subregional organizations have carried out various activities in support of small island developing States, including strengthening of specific national institutions and administrative capacity (for details, see E/CN.17/1998/7/Add 7). For instance, the Caribbean Center for Development Administration (CARICAD), with funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Caribbean Development Bank, has been working with six small island developing States Governments over the past three years to strengthen institutional capacity for defining and implementing national sustainable development planning and programmes. Four modalities were adopted to strengthen national institutions: (a) establishing a national advisory and coordinating mechanism or sustainable development council; (b) launching a consultative process at the national and regional levels; (c) conducting case studies of innovative experiences from which to derive policy and operational insights and lessons; and (d) establishing a regional network for information sharing. Since the start of this project, CARICAD has collaborated extensively with national sustainable development councils in these countries in strengthening public environmental management systems, organizing training in key areas pertaining to institutional development and capacity-building, and conducting case studies in priority areas. At the recent Caribbean ministerial meeting on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, it was recommended that CARICAD, with support from interested Governments and relevant regional and international agencies, extend the network of national sustainable development councils to the whole region.

9. In the Pacific, a number of agencies are involved in providing assistance in capacity-building in small island developing States. For instance, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has coordinated the preparation of national environmental management strategies throughout the region, with assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UNDP and Australia. The process included a review of relevant legislation, preparation of a state-of-the-environment report, national seminars and the development of a national environmental strategy. In addition, regional cooperation has taken place under the Capacity 21 Project funded by UNDP, aimed at strengthening national frameworks for sustainable development, sustainable development planning and financing, environmental legislation and environmental law training. Also, the South Pacific Commission (SPC) is facilitating the work of the Pacific Sustainable Development Network, which is designed to strengthen the capacity of institutions in the region and to develop effective and efficient systems for information exchange. Since the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, numerous workshops and seminars have been held by United Nations and non-United Nations organizations for the training of civil servants involved in environmental management, not only in the Pacific but also in the Caribbean (for more details, see E/CN.17/1998/7/Add.9).

IV. Action by the United Nations system

10. Recognizing the lack of institutional and administrative capacity in small island developing States, United Nations agencies have undertaken a variety of programme activities and projects with a view to

strengthening the capacity of small island developing States to pursue sustainable development. A short review of selected activities and projects is provided below on a region-by-region basis.

A. Asia and the Pacific

11. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has provided support to Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu in environmental law, assisting them in drafting environmental legislation and formulating a framework for environmental law. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has several projects aimed at enhancing national institutions and the administrative capacity of small island developing States in the ESCAP region. One project involves subregional workshops on economic stabilization, liberalization and deregulation, while another involves enhanced intraregional cooperation in trade and investment; both projects emphasize the fragile ecology of island countries and the importance of integrating environmental consideration in the economic decision-making. In addition, the ESCAP/Pacific Operation Centre has assisted SPREP in the implementation of Capacity 21 projects, including the design and conduct of workshops. It has also provided advisory services to SPC and the South Pacific Forum (SPF), including recommendations for rationalizing the management of marine resources among the regional bodies.

12. Within the framework of its regional programme, UNDP has supported both the establishment of a regional network for the exchange of information on Pacific island marine resources and the concerted efforts of Pacific island countries to maximize the exploitation of abundant tuna resources while ensuring the sustainability of future stocks. UNDP has also supported, through the regional indicative planning figures (IPFs), programmes on improved management, use and development of forest and tree resources, and management of water supply and sanitation.

13. A programme on capacity-building for sustainable development in the South Pacific, funded from UNDP's Capacity 21, is geared towards assisting the Pacific small island developing States in strengthening governmental and non-governmental capacity for sustainable development through the greater participation and improved capabilities of traditional Pacific island institutions. The programme fosters the participation of the general public, including women, in development planning. The anticipated outcomes include improved capacity of Governments to promote and enforce sustainable land and sea resource use; the creation of integrated, cross-sectoral and participatory national frameworks for sustainable development for each subregion (Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia); improved capacity of financial planners and investment institutions to integrate environmental issues into lending policies; and the reform of legislation to support sound land and sea management.

14. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, through its technical assistance activities, implemented a project in the Marshall Islands during 1993-1996 aimed at improving public sector management. The project addressed a number of constraints faced by the public service of the Marshall Islands, including its organization and staffing, policy-making capacity in the economic and social sectors, and the shortage of adequate skills of many staff members. The World Bank and the SPF secretariat also supported and participated in the implementation of the project.

15. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development/World Trade Organization International Trade Centre has conducted several training programmes and other related projects in the region, as well as in the Caribbean, aimed at enhancing national capacity in international trade, including improvement of import management. Other activities of the Centre include identification of technical cooperation needs in the export/import sector and a series of dissemination seminars and workshops.

B. The Caribbean

16. The Caribbean work programme of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) contains an environment and development component whose objective is to strengthen the capabilities of member countries to incorporate environmental considerations into development planning. Among other programme activities, ECLAC has conducted a critical examination of the availability of environmental information in the Caribbean, and an assessment of the implications for planning and decision-making. Its work in the environmental statistics for the region will lead to a database and a directory of sources of environmental information.

17. In the Caribbean small island developing States, UNDP is supporting natural disaster management and reduction programmes through regional IPF funding. The main thrust of the activities is aimed at creating national and regional capacities to deal with natural and man-made disasters, and also to address the preparation and implementation of contingency response measures and comprehensive long-term disaster management plans integrated into the national development planning process.

The organization is also supporting the establishment of an independent satellite-based regional radio and data communications network, with multilingual transmission capabilities, through the enhancement of the regional information distribution system of the Caribbean News Agency. It is envisaged that the project will also strengthen the regional integration linkages within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), as well as the information link between CARICOM and Latin America. Furthermore, UNDP is currently providing assistance in upgrading the maritime legal and administrative regimes of member States of CARICOM for the implementation of a system of port State control, which will enable them to exercise jurisdiction over foreign vessels in order to ensure compliance with international maritime safety and pollution regulations. UNDP is also supporting a number of other projects, including (a) the enhancement of land-use policies and regimes throughout the Caribbean under a human settlements and related environmental management programme; (b) institutional strengthening of the Environmental Division of the Guyana Agency for Health Sciences, Education, Environment and Food Policy; and (c) institutional strengthening of the Planning Institute of Jamaica.

18. Pursuant to the provisions of the Small Island Developing States Technical Assistance Programme, UNDP undertook an assessment of the priority technical needs of the Caribbean small island developing States. The results were embodied in two reports. The first, prepared by CARICAD, was based on a careful process of consultations with a number of stakeholders in the region to identify and assess priority needs in the technical cooperation and capacity-building necessary to implement the Programme of Action. A multidisciplinary team, with expertise in physical planning and environmental legislation, agriculture and post-harvest technologies, natural resources management, sustainable tourism development, institutional development and capacity-building, visited a number of Caribbean small island developing States with different ecological, demographic and economic characteristics. The second report constituted a compendium of technical cooperation among developing countries project profiles designed to address some of the unmet technical cooperation needs and gaps in institutional resources of the Caribbean small island developing States. Most of the project profiles seek to strengthen capacities at the national, subregional and regional levels through the convening of technical training workshops and symposia in other priority areas of the Programme of Action.

19. A four-volume directory of experts of small island developing States, prepared with UNDP support and circulated to all UNDP offices and key intergovernmental institutions in the small island developing States, has become a valuable source of reference for identifying and drawing upon appropriate national and regional expertise available in small island developing States for the implementation of the Programme of Action.

C. The African small island developing States

20. UNEP has provided assistance to Seychelles in collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements to formulate new land planning and development control legislation and regulation, with the objective of establishing an adequate legal and institutional framework for the management and sustainable utilization of land resources. Within the framework of its regional programme, UNDP seeks to facilitate access of a number of African small island developing States to new and reliable knowledge and information through the Small Island Developing States Information Network (SIDSNET). Small island developing States' institutions in Africa will be enabled to update their databases on-line, and apart from providing access to important small island developing States databases, SIDSNET will include World Wide Web calendars, forums and directories. Although it will initially focus on only three chapters of the Programme of Action (Coastal and marine resources; Energy; and Sustainable tourism), it will be gradually expanded to include the other issues embodied in the Programme of Action. The African Internet Initiative, with the support of SIDSNET, will ensure that Internet connectivity is provided to Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe and the Comoros, and will work with the Indian Ocean Commission to promote inter-island networking. In addition, UNDP has commissioned a non-governmental organization in the region to carry out an assessment-cum-formulation mission of unmet technical cooperation priorities in small island developing States in the Africa region.

V. Bilateral and multilateral assistance

21. National institutions and administrative capacity is one of the few areas that has attracted relatively high bilateral and multilateral assistance. Available data on external support to small island developing States indicate that in 1994, the latest year for which data classified according to the chapters of the Programme of Action are available, annual bilateral commitments to this area totaled US$43.12

million, while multilateral commitments totaled US$8.10 million.

22. However, as in the case of human resources development, external assistance from bilateral sources in this area experienced significant declines. Total bilateral commitments fell from US$54.88 million in 1991 to US$43.12 million in 1994. Multilateral assistance did not change perceptibly in 1994 compared to 1991.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

23. Since the Global Conference, most small island developing States' Governments have taken important initiatives to strengthen national institutions and administrative capacity. The foregoing brief review shows that many of them have established high-level bodies charged with the overall responsibility for guiding and coordinating national policies and measures for integrating environmental protection and development. New legislation has been adopted to provide a sound and updated legal framework for the pursuit of sustainable development. Comprehensive national strategies have been formulated that will provide a blueprint for long-term coordinated action. There has also been a growing trend of public participation.

24. Regional organizations and the United Nations system have provided indispensable support to national efforts concerning institutional and administrative capacity-building. Their assistance, whether through project funding or technical cooperation, has been extended to a large number of programme areas, contributing to the capacity-building of small island developing States in different sectors.

25. There is, however, a continuing need for strong action in this area since small island developing States remain constrained by limited financial, human and technical resources. Some have very limited capacity, even for handling inter-agency coordination. Planning and implementation of sustainable development policies and measures remain uncoordinated, and are invariably fragmented. There is therefore room for improving inter-ministerial coordination at the national level and more effective cooperation at the regional level. The crucial importance of strengthening national institutions and administrative capacity for sustainable development and the difficult capacity-building process that it entails cannot be overemphasized: the significant declines in external financial support in this area are a matter of grave concern.

B. Recommendations

1. National level

26. Small island developing States' Governments should further strengthen their national sustainable development bodies by enhancing their political and legal status, increasing their staffing levels and improving their modalities of operation. Those that have not established such a body should take immediate action to ensure that a national mechanism for guiding and coordinating sustainable development policy be put in place and be given adequate status and resources for effective functioning.

27. Although many small island developing States have adopted new legislation and formulated national strategies, they need to ensure that the new laws are enforced and that strategies are implemented. Particular attention should be paid to the training of civil servants to adequate levels in order to enable them to effectively implement reformed legislation and revised development strategies.

2. Regional level

28. Small island developing States' Governments should both expand and deepen their regional and subregional cooperation in national institutions and administrative capacity-building, especially in areas where they are lacking in expertise and where joint activities in research and training could help to overcome national resource constraints, facilitate the exchange of national experiences and increase the cost-effectiveness of regional cooperation.

29. Regional institutions should be given adequate resources to provide research and training opportunities, undertake critical assessments of priorities and needs, and facilitate the exchange of experience and dissemination of information. Regional institutions that have the right expertise should assist these countries in the preparation of new legislation, as necessary, and in the formulation and implementation of national strategies.

3. International level

30. The international community should provide adequate financial resources to small island developing States so as to enable them to carry out necessary institutional reforms and changes and to improve their national administrative capacity. The United Nations agencies should increase training activities to help to update and improve the skills

of staff engaged in sustainable development activities. Organizations with the appropriate technical capacity, including funds and programmes and specialized agencies, should also provide technical assistance or advisory services to small island developing States in building up their national institutions.

31. Bilateral donors should provide financial and technical support to small island developing States to facilitate their ratification and implementation of relevant international instruments; help to provide training opportunities and facilities, including scholarships, particularly in areas where small island developing States suffer from serious lack of local expertise; and support current efforts at building an information network for small island developing States so that they may have better access to information on the state-of-the-art technology and become active participants in exchange of experience and dissemination of information.